

Let's begin where we ended last week. It is the entire theme of this Letter.

Romans 1:16-17 NKJV For I am not ashamed of the **gospel** of Christ, for it is the power of God to **salvation** for everyone who **believes**, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. (17) For in it the **righteousness** of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "**THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.**"

Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4 but let's read verses 3-4:

Habakkuk 2:3-4 NKJV For the vision *is* yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry. (4) "Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live **by his faith.**"

The just are the righteous ones. In the Hebrew they are called "Tzadik". This is the word that God used to describe Noah in Genesis 6:9.

There are several senses of meaning here. The word righteousness as it is used here by Paul means "equitable", that is, our God is equitable in His treatment of all mankind. We are all sinners who deserve and receive a death sentence. There's a second sense of having been justified and made righteous by Christ's atoning work on the Cross, whereby the believer will live out his/her earthly life by faith. And there is one more idea wrapped up in these 2 verses, that is, by believing in Christ Jesus as our substitute, our LORD and our God by faith, we are then declared justified before our most Holy and Righteous God.

Note also that this is personal, that is, the Spirit clearly says that the justified one will live by his/her faith – not on the coattails of another! But I would also like to offer this: can this also mean "the justified will live by God's faith"? the Son is faithful and will keep His sheep safe and sound until He presents us blameless as a chaste Bride before His and our Father!

Now, for Paul to explain this verse and its impact on all of mankind, he will begin, as it were, at the beginning. Not with creation itself

which was deemed by God as “very good”, but life after the fall of Adam and Eve. He will present “the other side” of justification, that is, judgment, and show us step by step that no matter who is reading this letter, Jewish or Gentile, there are none righteous, not even one.

Romans 1:18-32 NKJV For the **wrath of God** is revealed from **heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness** of men, **who suppress the truth in unrighteousness**, (19) because what may be known of God is **manifest in them**, for God has shown *it* to them.

The wrath of God. Most of us were brought up thinking that this is God’s explosive anger and punishment against His enemies or even His chosen ones when they willfully disobey. But God’s wrath is measured and He’s never ‘out of control’. And His wrath is never a surprise! His prophets always warned those who would hear. The entire Revelation of Jesus Christ is a warning about what’s to come, especially during the 7-year Tribulation.

The meaning of the word **wrath** is similar in the Greek and Hebrew. It is both poetic and very intense. The wrath of God is likened to a strong hot breath that blows out of His nostrils. It is associated with passion, rage, burning anger, indignation, punishment, and vengeance. However, these are human concepts born of mankind’s experience when they willfully and defiantly disobeyed God’s commands. In other words, let’s not confuse our feelings that are very much influenced by our fallen nature with God’s pure and purposeful actions towards His creation – especially towards those who refuse to believe!

And this last point is what Paul is trying to convey: the unbelievers who are ungodly, unrighteous and liars are without excuse! Paul clearly says that knowledge of God is within all mankind. Solomon wrote, “...Also He has put eternity in their hearts” (**Ecclesiastes 3:11**), meaning we all have an innate understanding of our Creator God. It started with Adam when God breathed His Spirit into the clump of clay formed in His image and Adam became a “living soul”.

Paul says “for God has shown it to them”. The atheist or scoffer who clearly understands everything pertaining to life would ask, “How has He shown it to us?”.

(20) For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, **even His eternal power and Godhead**, so that they are without excuse,

I love the phrase “His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen”. It reminds me of our faith that is based on the “evidence of things not seen”. We simply have to look around us to see all His attributes, especially His creative power that spoke all things into existence and sustains all life by His word. Life is way too complicated and too complex for any man to understand. Even with all the so-called science, no one has yet to understand “first life”, that is, how did life begin? How did all that is required for life to sustain itself come about from elements that contain no life? Honest people humble themselves and recognize that only a Living Being can be a Life-giver! Only the humble can say “In the beginning, God...”.

But Paul also goes further. God must be eternal, that is, God is uncreated without beginning or end. Don't try to think about this – you'll end up with a brain bleed. And if that's not enough, Paul says that even His divine nature (Godhead) is seen. The most important aspect of His Nature is His triune nature, that is, the Three Persons that are one God. If His eternal nature will cause a brain bleed, certainly thinking on His triune nature will cause your brain cells to flee out of your ears! But know this, God is uniquely God, there is none like Him!

Listen, I don't want to overwhelm you, but I do want you to be in constant awe of our God. I want you to not only be in awe of Him, I want you to love Him and serve Him because there is no one greater than the Creator of the universe. He created YOU and me in His image so that we could relate to Him. He sent His Son not just to **save** but to **reveal**.

John 14:7-11 NKJV "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know

Him and have seen Him." (8) Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." (9) Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? (10) Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. (11) Believe Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.

John 10:30 NKJV I and My Father are one."

Again, Paul makes it abundantly clear: because of what you truly know, even if you don't believe it or even if you try to suppress it, **you are without excuse and will stand silent before Him when you meet Him face to face.**

(21) because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (22) Professing to be wise, they became fools, (23) and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

With eternity in their hearts, men have a desire for meaning in their lives. **Some looked up and confessed:**

Psalms 19:1 NKJV The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.

Job 12:7-10 NKJV "But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; And the birds of the air, and they will tell you; (8) Or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; And the fish of the sea will explain to you. (9) **Who among all these does not know That the hand of the LORD has done this, (10) In whose hand is the life of every living thing, And the breath of all mankind?**

Nehemiah 9:6 You alone *are* the LORD; You have made

heaven, The heaven of heavens, with all their host, The earth and everything on it, The seas and all that is in them, And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.

Psalms 33:6-9 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. (7) He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses. (8) Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. (9) For He spoke, and it was *done*; He commanded, and it stood fast.

Some looked within and they proudly and rebelliously believed that they were god and therefore, all these only did what was right in their own eyes.

Read Job Chapters 38 through 41!

Still, others, who also did not glorify the One True God and had no gratitude for the lives they lived, wanted something more tangible, more visible and more real to worship. So they created images made of wood, clay, silver and gold. The images were like men and women. They were like birds, animals and even creeping things.

Then there are others who believe in anything and everything that is not GOD. But God says to them:

Psalms 14:1-3 NKJV To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David. The fool has said in his heart, "*There is* no God." They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good. (2) The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. (3) They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; *There is* none who does good, No, not one.

What is a loving God to do with those who deny Him, ridicule Him, hate Him and even while not believing in Him, rebel against Him by doing evil and wicked things?

As the Creator, I suppose He could just wipe every evil, wicked, unbelieving fool off the face of the earth. And continue to do so with each new unrighteous person as soon as their leprous spots appear.

Because Scripture declares that there are none righteous, no not one, He could simply kill off everyone on the earth and start over. Only this time, not sparing even 8 people.

Obviously, these are my ideas, that is, my awful ideas. So, I ask again, **what can be done with wicked, evil people?** Let me ask another question. **What did you do with your children who were taught right from wrong but seemed to always choose wrong?** When they were younger, they were punished and possibly spanked. When they got older and approaching adulthood (physically and not in maturity), you might have, like Nancy and I have done, allowed them to experience the consequences of their decisions, even when it was painful or severe. So, when one of them was caught driving without insurance in a state where it was a jailable offense, he went to jail, and he was told that we would not bail him out or pay for a lawyer. He was on his own. Sometimes the hardest lessons must be learned on our own.

So, perhaps God does the same thing. God's righteous anger allows us to experience the self-destructive result of sin. Can we imagine Him, with tears, saying "ok, if that's your heart's desire, even knowing that there's a better way, go ahead". But you might protest and ask, "Would God allow a person to follow his/her evil desires and possibly die in their sins and end up condemned to hell?". I believe the answer is yes. I say this knowing that God wishes that none should perish. I say this knowing that God offers a way of escape. He has, through His fathomless grace and mercy, given mankind truth through His faithful prophets, His Word and especially His Son who in "...His divine power has given to us **all things** that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue. [2 Peter 1:3](#) **"To Know God is to Know godliness"**

This idea of "giving us up" is repeated two more times. This alone makes it critically important to understand and share with others as a warning! Let's read what Paul said:

(24) Therefore God also **gave them up to uncleanness**, in the **lusts** of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, **(25)** who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

The flesh is a cruel master. The lust of the heart is deceitful. The combination is deadly. With mankind's insistence on rebellion to rules that were all given to keep them safe, and mankind's seemingly remarkable ability to believe a lie, God said, "Have at it. And when you are miserable, come home to Me for your Father's arms are open wide.

So, what did they lust after? Anything that would satisfy the unchecked passions of their flesh. They worshipped their own flesh and the flesh of others. Their actions were both physically and morally "unclean". This word also alludes to demonic influences.

But Paul wants to be sure that his readers understand these lusts. Therefore, he gives them more details:

(26) For this reason God **gave them up to vile passions**. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.

(27) Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

Paul describes uncleanness as "vile passions". At least one preacher would not read these verses publicly because he found them so offensive. He was quoted as saying, "This first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans is a dreadful portion of the Word of God. I should hardly like to read it all through aloud; it is not intended to be so used. Read it at home, and be startled at the awful vices of the Gentile world." That preacher was Charles Spurgeon.

But Paul only wrote as the Holy Spirit directed and as difficult as it was to hear, it had to be said. The Greek and Roman cultures of the day were known for their acceptance and

promotion of homosexuality and other “unnatural” acts. Paul used the words “female” and “male” instead of women and men which adds a level of separation from their ‘humanness’ and places such people in the realm of animals.

And this lust is more than an just abomination in the eyes of God, it carries with it consequences which affect the health and well-being of those who practice such things. There are natural consequences to unnatural acts. Many say that AIDS is a punishment for these things. But God didn’t have to bring this on them, they brought it on by the “misuse” of their bodies (of course, with human actions, there are also unintended casualties, that is, those who got these deadly diseases through no action of their own. This isn’t limited to sexual sins described here. Sexual sin of any kind can be deadly – whether by homosexuals or heterosexuals. It can kill the body and it can destroy relationships and families.

Are we overwhelmed yet? Perhaps Paul is being too narrow in his examples. Let’s see:

(28) And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God **gave them over** to a **debased mind**, to do those things which are not fitting; (29) being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, (30) backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, (31) undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;

The word ‘debased’ perhaps might make a stronger statement if we used the word “reprobate” or “worthless” or even “rejected”. Paul says that it’s our choice to “retain God in our knowledge”. Those who reject God and cast Him aside (so to speak) causes their thinking to become worthless and rejected by God. Their futile thinking led them to do things that were not fitting (perhaps ‘not fit to live’). Then comes the list:

all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, (30)

backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, (31) undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;

I think we could all agree that this list is comprehensive description of the godless men and women roaming the earth, wreaking havoc and leaving the consequences of these actions in their wake.

Romans 1:20-23 For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, **so that they are without excuse,** (21) because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (22) Professing to be wise, they became fools...

Romans 1:32 who, **knowing the righteous judgment of God,** that those who practice such things are deserving of death, **not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.**

As prevalent as this was in Paul's day, I think it's worse now that we live in an age of super-fast international communications. Just go online (if you dare) and read all the advice given to anyone who would listen: it's ok to do this; it's cool to do that; join us and we will love you unconditionally not like your hypocritical and judgmental parents! This kind of thinking led one after-school program in an elementary school to have a drag-queen presentation! Oh God, forgive them!

We live, once again, in a time where most people do what's right in their own mind.

God is very clear about what a mind that is devoid of God is like. Yes. It's start in the mind. Godless thoughts lead to Godless emotions and end with Godless actions. Godless minds must worship someone or something. Godless minds worship themselves or something they believe will bring them fulfillment and satisfaction. Could be possessions, could be wealth, could be health, could be another

person. None of these things (or any other examples) is inherently evil. It's our lust for them as a substitute for God that's brings disease, anxiety and death of the soul.

While Paul starts out talking about sexual sin, this isn't all about homosexuals. Heterosexuals have their fair share of sinful behavior. They too receive in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. God is just and equitable to all!

Let's not lose sight of the purpose of the letter: to present the gospel as the answer to mankind's deathly dilemma.

He's starting with those who don't believe in Him, reject His existence, and live a life without even a moment's thought of Him. They justify this by tearing down Biblical truth. They justify this by exalting the 'Knowledge of Good and Evil". They justify this by denying morality, boundaries, and rules. They justify this by believing in the essential goodness of man that only needs education, understanding, tolerance, inclusiveness and understanding the diverse thoughts and lifestyles of others. They justify their sin by doing good works which is more of a cover-up than justification. Do not be fooled. These things, that they believe will save them. But God clearly says:

Isaiah 64:6 NKJV But we are all like an unclean *thing*, And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.